



Transcultural
Mental Health Centre

A practical guide about:
Stress and stress management – (ENGLISH)

The aim of the booklet – *'A Practical Guide About: Stress and stress management'* is to assist individuals to identify issues relating to stress and then explore and deal with personal stress problems so that individuals can enjoy a sense of wellbeing at home, at work, in social situations or during recreation.

The objective of the information contained within this booklet is to assist individuals to identify issues relating to stress and stress management by:

- recognising the sources of stress.
- recognising when stress is becoming a problem.
- explaining some of the tools to manage stress (like nutrition and exercise).
- explaining relaxation (such as what is relaxation, and what are the benefits of relaxation).
- providing a number of quick and easy stress reducers.

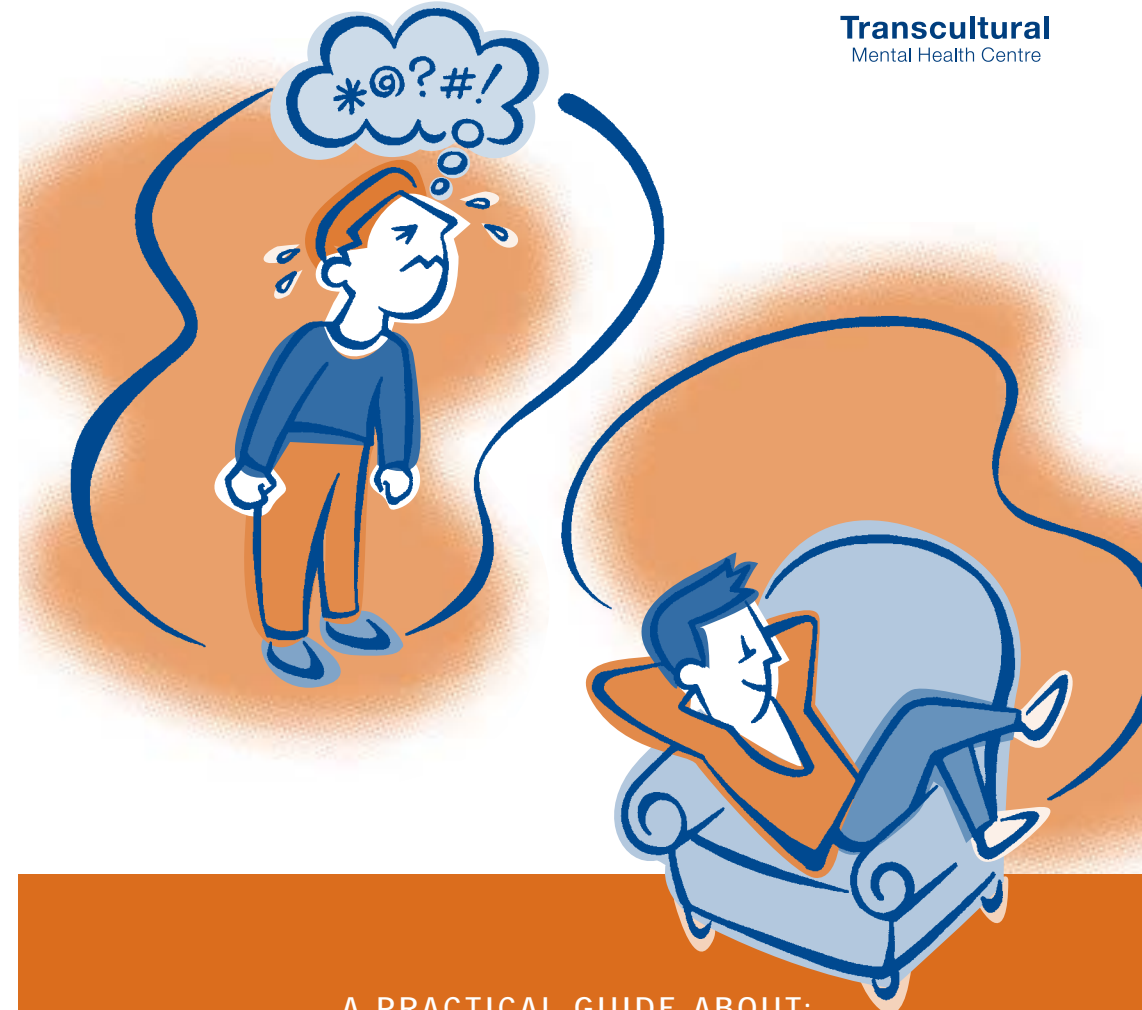
This booklet is available in the following languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, Farsi, German, Greek, Italian, Spanish and Vietnamese.

Other booklets available in *'A Practical Guide'* series include:

- PROMOTING WELLBEING.
- PROBLEM SOLVING AND GOAL SETTING.
- A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP. This booklet is available in the following languages: Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, English, Farsi, Filipino, Greek, Indonesian, Italian, Maltese, Polish, Spanish and Vietnamese.



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A PRACTICAL GUIDE ABOUT:

Stress and stress management

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Copies of this and related booklets in the 'A Practical Guide' series (as well as other resources) are available from the:

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The information contained within this booklet has been compiled from a number of published and unpublished sources.

The Transcultural Mental Health Centre (TMHC) has received permission to use information from the following publications:

Western Sydney Area Health Promotion Centre. (1987). Relaxation and Stress Management Techniques. Western Sydney Area Health Service.

Western Sydney Area Health Promotion Centre. (1993). Learn to Unwind. A Workbook on Relaxation and Stress Management Techniques. Western Sydney Area Health Service.

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This publication is intended to provide general information only. It should not be used as a substitute for seeking professional help. You may want to consider consulting your local general practitioner on issues raised in this booklet. There are also a number of telephone numbers and websites on page 9 of this booklet that you may find useful.



Some useful telephone numbers

Mental Health Line
Tel: 1800 011 511

In an emergency call 000 immediately.

Transcultural Mental Health Centre
Tel: 1800 648 911

If English is not your first language the **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)** can provide you with free assistance on 131 450.

WayAhead - Mental Health Association NSW
Tel: 1300 794 991

Some useful websites

WayAhead – Mental Health Association NSW
<https://wayahead.org.au>

Multicultural Health Communication Service
www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au

NSW Ministry of Health
www.health.nsw.gov.au

Local Health Districts and Specialty Networks are listed at www.health.nsw.gov.au/lhd

If you are interested in attending a course on any one of the 'A Practical Guide' series topic areas, phone the Transcultural Mental Health Centre on (02) 9912 3850 to register your interest.

If you live in rural and remote areas of NSW you can call the TMHC (free call) on 1800 64 8911 to register your interest.

More quick and easy stress reducers

- Have a quiet, pleasant-sounding alarm to wake you up.
- If mornings are rushed and stressful, get up earlier so you have more time.
- Take a deep breath and relax each time you look at your watch.
- Try to slow down when you eat, talk, drive or move.
- Don't arrange to do too many things close together or at the same time.
- Off-load non-essentials.
- Eliminate behaviours that don't save much time, or achieve a great deal eg. frenzied lane-changing or beating the lights.
- Take a break from tasks to stretch, walk, relax or to enjoy the present.
- Buy a packet of small blank adhesive labels. Print 'R' on each and stick onto mirrors, the steering wheel of your car, the fridge etc to remind you to relax throughout the day.
- Give time to yourself, to do things you enjoy. Do them just for fun without the need to compete or be the best.
- Learn to say NO – but not indiscriminately. People who can say NO often say YES and feel good about it.
- Reduce anger towards others – tolerance and acceptance are good for your health.



Stress

What is stress ?

Stress is a demand or pressure placed on ourselves that can make us feel tense, unhappy or uncomfortable. This demand or pressure is often called the 'stressor'. For example, writing exams, being told off by one's boss, meeting deadlines or moving house are examples of situations that we may find stressful.



When does stress become a problem

Stress becomes a problem when:

- our stresses are so big, occur so often, or last so long that we are unable to handle them well.
- we have been overstressed for some time and can notice effects like nervousness, headaches and insomnia.
- the energy-draining effect of overstress is noticed in extreme fatigue, poor judgement and low output for the effort involved.
- a lowering of the natural resistance to disease is seen in increased illness.
- friends, relatives and colleagues see signs of strain and feel concerned.



We can stop stress escalating by secondly recognising the warning signs.



Why do we experience stress?

There have been many explanations offered as to why we experience stress. Some studies suggest that individuals inherit the tendency to feel more stress than others. Others studies describe stress as a response that is learned over a lifetime. Thus, people who experience high levels of stress tend to hold beliefs which make them feel threatened and out of control.



Sources of stress

What are the most common sources of stress for you? Read each item and tick the column that best reflects the degree of stress caused by that item using the following scale:

0 – No stress 1 – Little stress 2 – Moderate stress 3 – Severe stress

THREATS	0	1	2	3
Threat of real bodily harm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exaggerated fears or phobias	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Threat to present lifestyle e.g. threat of losing job, of marital separation, of loss of health.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial difficulties.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feelings of not being worthwhile.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

CHANGE	0	1	2	3
Work relocation, moving house, changing jobs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Welcome changes e.g. marriage, lottery win, promotion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Relaxation



What is relaxation?

Relaxation is a way of producing a quiet body and a calm mind. This physical and mental unwinding is termed the relaxation response and it counteracts the stress response. People who normally live with a high degree of tension are more likely to experience problems when any extra stress occurs. These people can lower their general level of tension by regular relaxation practice and so cushion themselves against overstress. By doing this, more hassles can be tolerated without causing problems.



Relaxation is a useful tool, either used alone or in conjunction with other strategies, for the reduction of stress. All you require to relax is:

- a place free from sudden sounds and interruptions.
- a suitable time.
- a position in which you are able to let go of muscle tension and in which you won't fall asleep unless that is your aim.

Relaxation can also mean:

- having a massage.
- movement – some form of movement like shaking, swinging or loose rhythmic activity can play a part in enhancing relaxation by releasing physical tension.
- listening to music.
- patting your pet.
- having a nap.
- reading a good book.



The most important point is to set aside time for it to happen.



Exercise

The stress response is nature's way of preparing the body for action. Yet physical action is often not useful for dealing with modern day stresses. Slotting a regular exercise period into your day will release built up tension and satisfy your body's need for activity. Any regular physical exercise is helpful, such as:

- walking.
- swimming.
- jogging.
- social sports.
- gardening.

How can exercise reduce stress?

Exercise can help you feel good, calm you down, or generate creative ideas;

It raises your basic level of fitness, and helps you cope with everyday demands as well as the occasional crisis; and

It acts as a distraction and gives you a break from your worries.

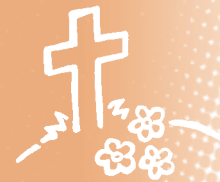
Before making a start on exercise, however, talk to a doctor if you have health problems, are a heavy smoker, are more than 10 kilograms overweight, or are concerned about joint pain (back, knees, hips).



Unwelcome changes e.g., divorce, unemployment, mortgage, ill health.

Short-term change e.g. doing something for the first time.

Long-term readjustment e.g. bereavement or retirement.



EXTREME DEMANDS

0 1 2 3

Many demands at once, time pressures

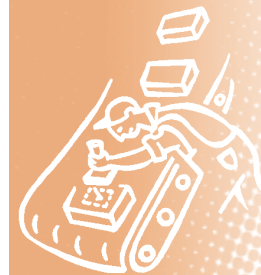
Heavy responsibility

Frustrating situations e.g. traffic jams, bureaucratic red tape, unproductive meetings.

Demanding environment e.g. overcrowding, noise.

Lack of stimulation e.g. repetitious job, retirement, lack of goals, social isolation

Lack of balance between work and leisure, stimulation and relaxation.





RELATIONSHIPS	0	1	2	3
Difficulty in expressing feelings and thoughts appropriately.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rarely able to say No to requests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unreal expectations of my relationships e.g. marriage means 'living happily ever after'.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of recognition or approval from others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling under the control of someone e.g. boss, parents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loneliness, lack of support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you require more information or assistance about any of the above you can contact your general practitioner or go to page 9 of this booklet for useful telephone numbers and web sites.

One way to lessen the impact of stress on our lives is to pick out an item and work out an action plan. The other way is to use relaxation techniques, which have been shown to be of benefit in improving health and wellbeing.

Irrespective of the causes, stress is an increasing part of our lives. Ignoring it will not make it go away. Once stress overload is recognised, there are skills we can acquire to address the problem. These include:

- looking after our nutritional requirements
- exercising
- relaxation.



Stress management

Is stress always negative?

Not at all. It can help us to achieve what we want to do. It brings anticipation and excitement into our lives as with a holiday or family celebration. It helps us to grow and change, to avoid danger and to strive for a goal. Managing stress doesn't mean getting rid of it. It means working with it to make it an exciting positive force in our life.

As stress increases so does our performance and wellbeing until the stress comfort zone is reached. It is only when we approach the point of over stimulation that we need to be ready to use our stress management skills. Stress becomes excessive when demands begin to strain or exceed the normal powers of adjustment.

The first step is to recognise the actual problem by being aware of the nature of stress, about our own stress response and what specific stress situations can cause us to feel overly stressed (see the first part of this booklet titled '*A Practical Guide About Stress*'). Once recognised, there are a number of stress management skills available to address this problem.

Nutrition

Eating wholesome foods provides a foundation for more effective management of stress. It is also recommended that we:

- limit caffeine intake to no more than five cups a day (and watch the intake of tea, chocolate and cola drinks as they also contain caffeine)
- eat regular meals
- cut down on salt (especially for people with high blood pressure or a history of high blood pressure in the family)
- enjoy life – give ourselves time to do the things we really enjoy.

